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'No Surplus Food Deliberately Put On Black Market'

NEW YORK — (AP) — The Catholic Relief Services said Monday that "no food that we ever delivered (to South Viet Nam) was deliberately put on the black market."

But, a spokesman said, "it's almost impossible to control 100 per cent the end result" of the massive world-wide food programs that Catholic Relief runs.



The spokesman, the Rev. Fabian Flynn, issued the statement in response to a Los Angeles Times story out of Saigon. The story said a U.S. government report detailing corruption and incompetence in distribution of surplus U.S. food by Catholic Relief in South Viet Nam has been suppressed.

The report, the story said, told of the surplus food winding up in the black market, being left to rot in warehouses, fed to pigs, given to Vietnamese government officials for their own use, and sold by parish priests to non-Catholics while given free to Catholics.

The Saigon dispatch said the report was prepared by the Public Safety Division of the U.S. Operations Mission there. The dispatch said the report was out less than a week after its March 26 distribution to U.S. officials there and in Washington before it was called back and "locked up."

The story said Ambassador

Henry Cabot Lodge reportedly approved the suppression.

Father Flynn said Catholic Relief will have more specific comment after it sees the newspaper story, but he attempted meantime to answer generally the report's allegations as given.

He said his agency has "a whole corps of 'end-use checkers' — they check on the distribution of the food, they check warehouses to see where food is moving, they check receipts to see who got the food."

If needy persons "do something" with the surplus American food that was not intended by Catholic Relief, he said, the agency marks them off the food list if it discovers the wrong.

But, he added, "You can't go into somebody's farm homes and see if they feed the food to their pigs."

As for the allegation that priests gave the food free to Catholics, but charged non-Catholics for it, Father Flynn said his agency's program is "non-discriminatory." He said, "the basis for giving the food is to give to the needy."

"Why, the second biggest program we have in the world is in Morocco where they're aren't but a handful of Catholics," he said.

He also mentioned the agency's programs in Nigeria, Ghana and India, which he said had few Catholics, adding: "In each of those countries we're the biggest distributor of American food — the surplus commodities."

In one country, which he declined to identify, Father Flynn said abuses on the part of government officials were found in Catholic Relief's food and clothing program. "We closed down the program until such time as the abuses were corrected, and in several months the program was reopened," he said.

"Our own auditors did that," he added, "... in the last two years."

Father Flynn said Lodge would "have to know about the report that was given... He's the ambassador."